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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GM](#)
SUBJECT: Bundestag Election, Northern Germany: Regional
Perspectives on the National Debate

REF: Berlin 1179

CLASSIFIED BY: CG Karen Johnson for reasons 1.5 b/d.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Heading into the September 27 national elections, a majority of northern Germans appears to be leaning in favor of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), mirroring national opinion. Hamburg's successful CDU/Greens government is viewed as a possible role model for a national level coalition, but the Greens still lag behind the Free Democratic Party, the CDU's preferred coalition partner, just three days before national elections, and has very little chance of pulling ahead. Due to an apparently unbridgeable divide between the FDP and the Greens, a coalition between the CDU, FDP and the Greens (the so-called "Jamaica coalition") appears unrealistic. END SUMMARY.

Hamburg CDU Focuses on the Undecided

¶2. (SBU) The Hamburg CDU decided to concentrate its heaviest campaigning efforts during the time immediately prior to the election, noting that most voters make up their minds in the last two to three weeks before an election. Activity is expected to peak in the last three days before the vote on September 27. According to the CDU Hamburg State Party Manager, the CDU has focused its efforts on swing voters since they will have the biggest impact on the outcome. The CDU is following the same strategy in Lower Saxony.

The Greens: Campaigning on Hamburg Success

¶3. (C) Lower Saxony's Greens Caucus Leader Stefan Wenzel told Consulate contacts that he believes the CDU would prefer a coalition with the Greens to a renewed Grand Coalition with the SPD, citing the relatively successful Black/Green coalition in Hamburg. (Comment: The Greens, however, are currently polling at 11 percent, about two points behind the FDP, the CDU/CSU's preferred coalition partner. It is unlikely that the Greens will be able to draw more support than the FDP. End comment.) Wenzel noted that the Greens perceive the Hamburg coalition as a "reliable partnership of equals," with both parties cooperating with mutual respect and accomplishing real results.

¶4. (C) Asked about the views of Federal Greens Chairperson and leftist frontrunner Juergen Trittin concerning a CDU/Greens coalition, Wenzel responded that coalition talks would not fail because Trittin's personal ambitions and interest in stepping out of Joschka Fischer's shadow are incentives for him to engage in coalition negotiations. He added that Federal Greens Chairperson Renate Kuenast and Cem Oezdemir would also be prepared to enter into a coalition with the CDU.

The FDP: At Odds with the Greens

15. (SBU) Lower Saxony FDP Caucus Leader Joerg Bode expressed the view to Consulate personnel that it would be difficult to form a national CDU/CSU-Greens coalition, but he rightly predicted that a statement in favor of a coalition with the CDU would emerge from the FDP party convention that was held on September 20. If a CDU/CSU-FDP coalition emerges from the elections, Bode predicts that the cooperation between the two parties will be smooth, as it has been in Lower Saxony over the past six years. Bode stressed that the CDU and FDP would likely succeed in budget consolidation without causing a revolt on the streets.

SPD: "Caught in a Race It Cannot Win"

16. (C) SPD Hamburg Caucus Leader Michael Neumann acknowledged to Consulate/Embassy officers in a recent meeting that the SPD is "caught in a race it cannot win." Neumann noted that despite contentious election topics such as the controversy over the proposed permanent nuclear storage site in Gorleben or renewed calls to ban the right-wing extremist National Democratic Party (NPD), SPD chancellor candidate Frank-Walter Steinmeier will not capitalize on CDU/SPD differences. He stated that the SPD will inevitably be fractured internally and subsequently shift to the left due to personal ambitions within that wing, regardless of who wins this election. Neumann lamented the lack of rational discourse on the future course of the SPD, and predicted a move to the left would lose centrist voters, while failing to regain the voters previously lost to The Left.

17. (SBU) According to local CDU officials, the SPD party suffers from several basic challenges, including: 1) lack of appealing personalities, 2) lack of credibility, and 3) lack of competence. Polls indicate that voters perceive the SPD more favorably than the CDU only with regard to social justice issues; in all other competence areas the CDU scored better (e.g. domestic security, labor issues, and finances). The CDU believes that up to 30 percent of SPD voters will consider voting for the CDU based solely on Chancellor Merkel's personal popularity.

The Left: Running on an Anti-Establishment Platform

18. (SBU) Although strong pockets of leftist support do exist in northern Germany, there has been little indication of any surge in popular support. Rallies have clearly brought the party faithful together, but the appeal has not expanded significantly beyond the traditional constituencies. As in the national campaign, locally The Left emphasizes increasing income disparities and throws blame for the economic crisis at the feet of "the establishment." The Left is already represented in the parliaments of Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Lower Saxony. According to a Forsa poll of September 19, the Left could receive up to 6 percent in the upcoming Schleswig-Holstein vote and thereby enter the S-H parliament for the first time. However, nothing expressed by any Consulate contacts indicates a belief that The Left will gain much more regionally than the percentage forecast in national polls.

The Extremist Right (NPD)

19. (SBU) Despite a well-publicized presence in northern Germany, right-wing extremist parties, such as the neo-Nazi NPD, are not considered a viable option. Political observers throughout the region do not believe that any of these parties would even come close to mustering the required 5 percent hurdle to enter the Bundestag. In reality, if any of the right-wing extremist parties gain votes, these will probably be "lost" as a percentage too small to factor into the total party shares. This will lower the total required to build a coalition for the more mainstream parties (reftel).

COMMENT

¶10. (SBU) Post's conversations with senior CDU, FDP, SPD and Greens representatives suggest that this election cycle is likely to result in a continuation of "business as usual," German-style. Some of Merkel's remarks in her campaign rally underscore the continuing importance of traditional German views: the relevance of social market economic principles, their role as an anchor of German stability, and the need to export these principles to the world. Her emphasis on the ability of a strong chancellor to "set the course right" implies that she sees her role -- and Germany's -- as a steady rudder in a time of turmoil. Absent any last-minute surprises, Merkel's personal popularity is likely to appeal to many voters in northern Germany, and lead to the CDU's continued role as a senior coalition partner. Regardless of which junior partner steps into the coalition, the resulting government will continue to cooperate closely with the United States, and work to enhance German-American ties. End comment.

¶11. (SBU): This message has been coordinated with Embassy Berlin.

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